

To Know as God Knows

A homily preached by Jennifer A. Hudson, May 28, 2015, at St. Paul's Episcopal Church on the Green, Norwalk, CT

In the name of the Creator, the Great Teacher, and Wisdom. Amen.

When I began teaching English to university students, I'd walked into my first classroom with a degree of naïveté: “knowledge was power” and I was going to empower my students with knowledge of how to read, write and think critically about the world around them. I was going to stimulate minds! I was a professor! (Albeit an adjunct one.)

Not that some minds weren't stimulated in my first composition classroom, but I soon came to realize that teaching involved a lot more than just trying to impress students with the information I'd learned on my subject. Pedagogical literature stressed the importance of active and engaged learning, as well as the affective dimensions of learning—which meant that students needed to have a way to relate to the subject in terms of what was personally important to them. This teaching philosophy broke significantly from the straight lecture style of instruction that had managed to put even me, the alpha student, to sleep in college!

While one student, a nursing major, had no trouble writing cohesive sentences, she struggled with the overall structure of a research-based essay. She came to me for extra help. I thought: maybe if I explain to her in terms she might understand instead of using this textbook approach...

So I sat down with her and sketched a skeleton—not an outline, but a real skeleton, with skull, spine and all. I said, “think of your thesis, the summary of your main point, as the skull of the essay; the spine is your introductory paragraph. The bones attached, like the

humerus or tibia, are your topic sentences for each subsequent paragraph. Each bone is connected to your main point, but is an offshoot. The concrete examples you provide, those are the muscles, the ‘meat’ on the bones.” (She loved that last statement!)

By using a visual method with this student, by meeting her where she was, she finally began to see and to understand the moves of academic writing. It was no longer a mystery to her.

I share this anecdote because tonight’s passages speak to knowledge and to seeing: how do we *know* God? How does God *know* us? How do we *see* God? How does God *see* us?

In our first lesson from Ecclesiasticus, God knows all things and sees what is hidden in His-Her creation, the good and the bad, but all full of God’s glory. Then, in Mark’s gospel, we are presented with the story of Bartimaeus, the blind man whose sight Jesus restores.

Interestingly, Bartimaeus is the only blind man healed by Jesus who receives a name in the gospel accounts. Equally intriguing is that *Timaeus* is not just the father of Bartimaeus in this gospel passage, but also the name of the famous treatise by Plato, whereby the philosopher comments on the order and beauty of the universe—note the semblance to our lesson from Ecclesiasticus—as the manifestation of the intellect. Seeing—sight—becomes the foundation of knowledge of the divine craftsperson and the ordered beauty of the universe He-She has fashioned.

I wonder, then, if what Bartimaeus might have sought from Jesus may not have been more than just physical sight—a sight that went *much* deeper, far beyond the mundane sense of seeing. What if it was the ability to see God, to know the goodness of the divine craftsperson, through a seeing of the creation’s ordered beauty and goodness via the intellect, via wisdom, via the divine craftsperson’s own eyes?

Wouldn't it be great if we could see God's creation the way God sees it? See *ourselves* as God sees *us*? How to do that when the destruction, prejudice, greed, oppression and abuse we inflict on each other, and on the planet, mars that vision? How do we come to know ourselves, the created, as God, the Creator, knows us in light of all the things happening in the world that make no rational sense? How do we see the glory?

Like any university teacher, I would say we need to adopt a critical lens, one that serves as our interpretational filter, and that lens is a God-like one. That doesn't mean we need to *be* like God; rather that we need to *think* in more God-like ways.

Part of that involves faith as well as willingness. My student from the anecdote I shared reminds me very much of the Bartimaeus from Mark's account: eager to see, to know, to understand, to follow. And that student finally did see and know and understand what rhetorical moves to make when I used the analogy that I did, when I met the student where she was.

God meets us where we are, just as teachers must meet their students where they are—knowing and understanding their student's mind sets, allowing their students to be who they are. Twice Bartimaeus pleads "have mercy on me" and Jesus answers "Go, your faith has healed you," meeting Bartimaeus where he was.

God meets us where we are—whether we believe or doubt, whether our beliefs are traditional or more unorthodox, whether we do good or bad—because God, the Great Teacher, sees and knows us intimately, at our cores, and therefore knows what form to take to reveal His-Her unconditional love and inextinguishable light and life, just as I, the university professor, presented the concepts to my student in a way that made sense to her. If the thesis was the skull and spine, the supporting ideas the branching-off bones, and the

examples the meat, then God is our skull and spine and we are the bones that branch off, in much the same way Jesus speaks of himself as the vine and we the branches in John 15. Our interaction with God through prayer and personal experiences form the meat.

I took such joy and pride in seeing my student's work unfold like a flower in bloom, and I delighted in seeing her develop her ideas and their expressions to their fullest. I can't help but think God does the same with us, giving us the tools and guidance needed to reach our full expressions, individually and collectively, then stepping back and saying with a smile, "Yes, this is good."

To know God and to see God is to know and see ourselves as God knows and sees us: as good.